

Creative Space

By Peter Lloyd

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Asked to decide what they need in order to perform more creatively, employee teams invariably include at the top of their list a stimulating space devoted to creative work. Allowed to design and furnish their own creative space, they also make excellent choices—choices confirmed by those who have designed successful creative spaces.

Yes, I mean to suggest that if you want to make space for creative work, the collective wisdom within your organization already knows pretty well what you need. This article, however, will help you employ that wisdom, avoid a number of pitfalls, and save valuable time, which we all know is money.

Why creative space?

The following paradox can confound your attempts to plan creative space: If your company already enjoys a thriving creative culture, you really don't need a special place to do creative work. If, on the other hand, creativity is not an integral part of your culture, a creative workspace will do little to make your organization more creative.

Regarding the first part of the paradox, any place in which a truly creative organization works already amounts to a creative work space. Fortunately the "spaces" they spontaneously create when they put their heads together make excellent models for the brick-and-mortar space you may want to construct. So why tamper with a good thing?

A specific creative space within an already thriving creative shop can do more than provide a defined area in which to perform creative work. A well-designed space can increase motivation, facilitate communication, expand interest in creativity beyond a creative department, crank up the creative tempo, showcase your company's commitment to creativity, entertain and inspire your clients, garner publicity around your creative mystique... There's really no end to the benefits you can gain if you go at it with your best creative attitude.

As for the second part of the paradox, there's little use building or even setting aside a place for creativity if your people do not feel authorized to innovate. The most stimulating creative workspace, no matter how creatively designed and appointed, will be made a mockery within a creatively stifling organization. However, one of the best ways to begin developing a creative culture is to literally make room for creativity, as long as you keep in mind that a creative space is not the solution but simply a step in the right direction.

Any organization can benefit from any step in the direction of fostering creativity. If your company percolates with creativity, you can gain workspace efficiencies and turn up the creative heat even higher. If not, why not start building your creative culture by defining a rallying point for even more effective steps in that direction?

What a space can do

What can a space devoted to creativity actually contribute? Designed properly and kept flexible enough to modify as needed, it can provide the kind of stimulation its users want, which can increase motivation and communication, encourage play and collaboration. It can also make efficient use of space by allowing users to share space, tools, other resources you might otherwise have to duplicate.

Play

One of creativity's most creative men and erudite gurus, [Stephen R. Grossman](#), says that being creative boils down to having fun. One of Steve's most admired gurus is [Edward de Bono](#). I had the privilege and treat of watching de Bono literally draw a diagram and illustrate how and why humor and creativity are identical processes.

Fun and play take people out of and away from the serious, narrowly focused business of drill-down thinking. The kind of thinking de Bono says to replace with lateral thinking. Fun and play allow and encourage humans to generate ideas that are unconnected or illogically connected, to jump from sense to non-sense. If you haven't found the ideas you need in the sensible world, they're obviously somewhere else. And we all know how difficult it can be to get people to go there.

When you walk into a place like [Catalyst Ranch](#), there's no missing the point. This place was made for play. It tells you, "It's okay to have fun here."

"Why else would they surround me in bright colors and litter the place with toys?" you tell yourself. "What else could they mean by a monkey on a pogo stick?"

Hundreds of creativity and brainstorming sessions have taught me that people in general—and especially people fresh from the corporate office, shop floor, or the sales road—need to be told it's okay to have fun and to play during work hours, while they're collecting their pay. Yet most of these people have no problem playing with babies or pets. Some have even been known to make fools of themselves at wedding showers and fraternity parties, in bowling alleys and karaoke bars, on fishing trips and family vacations.

People play at parties, because it's okay to play. No one is judging. At a party where you know your boss is examining your behavior, you have less fun. At your child's birthday party, amid a screaming throng of three-year-olds, you can't possibly be more ridiculous. The pressure's off. You might even join a food fight. But could you solve a serious problem under these conditions?

There it is again, that pressure to perform, that specter of evaluation, that demand for results.

The mind must leap laterally into the unknown to come up with brilliant ideas. And brilliant ideas deliver the best results. Play will get us into the dangerous unknown, sometimes to brilliant ideas, but it won't complete the problem-solving process. We need more. Not a map. There are no maps of the unknown. There are no roads in unexplored territories.

The best creative processes help us connect stuff we know has not been connected and to "what-if" those connections into possibilities. Effective creative processes help us make metaphors of what we know and to mirror the light of those metaphors onto our challenges. I've learned that to do this well, the processors must play. They don't have to hug and giggle. New York Times crossword puzzles make great fun for me. Origami is great fun for some. They just have to have fun.

Motivation

Grossman is the author of [Innovation, Inc.](#), which talks about two kinds of motivation—intrinsic and extrinsic. That is, motivation from inside and from outside the creator. Creative space can improve the principal external source of energy and attention—stimulation. You can increase extrinsic motivation with an attractive and stimulating place to create, but such an effort will offer short-term benefits at best.

On the other hand, how you build your creative space will determine the degree of intrinsic motivation your space provides. And here is where you can anticipate longer-term results. Allow its design to reflect and support the needs of its users and they will be motivated to the degree they see it as a product of their own making. Keep its physical properties flexible so that they can continue to adapt it. The more flexible and adaptable your design, the longer you will see both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational rewards.

Communication

You ask your employees to report to the same place every day in order to achieve a number of obvious efficiencies. Among these is the need to communicate face-to-face with each other. And yet we wall up certain individuals, not without reason in most cases, but not without a downside either. Namely, poorer communication, less collaboration, and less cross-pollination. It is a mistake to confine people in any way that will insulate them from cross-pollination. If you have to isolate people, for reasons of confidentiality, for example, make sure you equally enhance the opportunities for communication, especially face-to-face communication, to balance the equation.

A space designed as creative can lend itself to any kind of informal gathering. If allowed to do so, it will. We will see that informal gatherings are the principal source of new ideas the typical office.

A place to talk

It's essential that creative people have a place to exchange ideas, because when creative people meet and talk, things happen. Michael Michalko, author of [Cracking Creativity](#), points to research of David Bohm, who observes that Nobel Prize-winning physicists of this century—Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, and Wolfgang Pauli—shared ideas freely during informal discussions. Because their discussions were open, free, and spontaneous, everyone was able to advance his own theories when he went back to his private space.

The dynamics of face-to-face idea exchange can be improved when the environment supports open and free dialog. We hear complaints of conference room meetings with pre-arranged seating that become utterly predictable, boring, and much less productive than they could be. The opposite is true in a room in which people are free to get up and move around, stand up or stretch out, use the walls and easel pads to illustrate

their points, and so on.

It's these kinds of meetings that encourage dialog. The kind of meeting in which ideas bounce off other ideas and eventually collide to make a great new idea. Board rooms and conference rooms, the typical space reserved for meetings, all but kill creative expression. The focal points of innovation in most organizations are the places where people choose to gather informally—whether it's the coffee machine, copy machine, cafeteria, or hallways.

Why not provide such places?

In some organizations, the space set aside as informal places to talk has overtaken the space reserved for private offices. Extravagant suites for the top brass have been converted into public space. The top executives work out of the smallest spaces! Space is allotted according to what the users does. If the job requires more space, it gets more space. Since idea exchange is valued, it gets more space.

A place to generate ideas

*We call them gag sessions.
We get in there and toss ideas around.
And we throw them in and put all the minds together
and come up with something
and say a little prayer and open it and hope it will go.
—Walt Disney*

The unrestrained rowdiness of bouncing ideas off the wall is discouraged in the typical office out of respect for the need of other workers to concentrate. This is great for the concentrators, but not so good for the idea generators. They line up to book conference rooms which are often not available for spontaneous creative sessions. Small offices and cramped partitioned areas don't provide wall space for displaying large arrays of ideas. The typical office hinders creative work.

At Disney Imagineering, it's the other way around. "Sketches are pinned onto large storyboards. Dozens of them are added, taken away, switched around, re-drawn, crumpled up and tossed out, then fetched from the trash can, uncrumpled, and put back up."

A company that wants a creative culture needs to at least provide space that will encourage this kind of activity. Big ideas have a much better chance of conception and surviving birth when they have plenty of room. That great ideas arise from these spaces must be attributed to the indomitable creative spirit rather than the space. Creative people will make room, but you can save them the trouble by offering it to them.

A place to protect ideas

Doug Hall, author of [Jump Start Your Brain](#) and operator of the world-renowned Eureka! Ranch, likes to compare new ideas to babies. Like babies, ideas require care and protection in order to survive. You don't know what they will do when they grow up and you'll never know unless you nurture them and give them a chance.

Furthermore, how you raise them will have a lot to do with how they turn out.

The nurturing as well as the generation of ideas needs to take place in a risk-free zone. A nest, where fledgling concepts won't succumb to idea predators—those who would kill them before they have a chance to fly as well as those who might steal them. In fact, you should put at least as much security into protecting ideas in their formative state as you put into guarding your ideas from competitive eyes.

"At Walt Disney Imagineering there is no such thing as a bad idea," the imagineers write. "Each idea initially exists in a blue sky phase where we are free to test, experiment, and imagine with hope and intent that we will get somewhere." Marty Skylar, president of Imagineering, defines "risk-free" this way. "You can dream, create new things, and let your imagination go. No one's going to stomp on your because you came up with a strange, weird idea, because that's what your leaders expect from you."

A creative space can also be your company's idea warehouse. Whether in computer files or file cabinets, all ideas that can't be immediately implemented, should be stored where they can be retrieved easily, whether for research or inspiration.

A place to play

*When I was young I painted like Rafael.
It has taken me a lifetime to learn how to paint like a child.
—Pablo Picasso*

Michael Michalko attributes Disney's success to "his ability to draw out the inner child in his business associates and combine it with their business acumen." Michalko advises play because it relaxes tension in a group and leads to less "fixation and rigidity" and therefore, more spontaneous output.

We demonstrate in our Right Brain Workshops that if someone generates X number of ideas when they work alone, they will generate at least 2X, or twice as many, working in a group. Playing a game that involves random stimulation, they will generate X² number of ideas. Not only do they generate more ideas at play, the ideas generated by playful groups are always better.

It's always intrigued me that we "play" musical instruments and when we act on stage, we call it a "play." Both of these things, music and acting, are purely creative activities. Play is very similar to creativity, if not the same thing. When children play, they experiment with new roles and situations, preparing themselves, better than any formal lessons can, for similar situations they will face in life. What better way to prepare for a presentation, to act out a consumer's reaction to a new product, or run through a sales proposal—than role playing? What better place for role playing than a room where fun is known to reign, where risk is not a factor?

A place to showcase

Apart from the purely practical reasons to set aside creative space, consider the emotional rewards. They may be more difficult to measure and justify, but they deliver more powerful results in terms of employee satisfaction, performance, and loyalty. A creative space makes tangible your commitment to creativity. You can

let your team plaster it with awards or staff baby pictures. Either way, the effect is to say that the room belongs to them.

Andy Stefanovich in charge of what's next at the Richmond, Virginia, creative agency, [Play](#), explains that his clients are, "attracted to our open-mindedness and value our ability to help them think differently." Play's creative space drives home the message of creative leadership from every room, nook, and cranny. Its two floors of creative space include five concepting rooms, each designed to support the different ways their people create.

"Walt Disney Imagineering is not an art museum, but we do have one of the largest and finest collections of original paintings in the world. The artists who have dedicated their lives and talents to Disney dreams may not be world-famous, but their work is our greatest treasure."

A creative space demonstrates your company's concern for and commitment to creativity. This can have a continual positive effect on employees, and an immediate positive impact on visitors, especially new recruits, clients, and prospects.

Creativity is not like the weather: You can do something about it.
—John Kao, [Jamming](#)

In *Jamming: The art and discipline of business creativity*, John Kao advises managers to perform creative audits of their organizations. Kao's audit covers eight sections. The final section includes the questions, "What systems are in place for generating creative ideas... to stockpile and protect such ideas... to reward such ideas?"

If you ask these or similar questions as part your own creative audit and find that you need to improve these systems, a creative space can serve as one of the tangible ways to do so.

The open office

Kao says that "place confers tangibility to creativity." He devotes Chapter Five of *Jamming* to "Clearing a Place for Creativity" and examines places built to encourage and facilitate creative thinking.

Most of us are familiar with one successful model—the open office. The modern metropolitan newsroom probably remains the most familiar example of an open office, so vividly presented in the post-Watergate film, [All the President's Men](#). Gerald Haman, founder of the [Creative Solutions Network](#), created a space at his headquarters in Chicago called the Thinkubator. It provides what Fast Company calls, "wide-open intellectual spaces."

After acknowledging that all sorts of places can foster creativity, Kao explains how the open office rockets communication and collaboration to unprecedented levels. These indispensable ingredients for creativity can be further enhanced when cross-pollination is added to the recipe.

Cross-pollination, one of the most powerful catalysts for discovery, involves introducing ideas from diverse and

exotic sources. The more diverse and exotic, the better, and the greater the chances of happening upon a surprise collision of normally unrelated ideas, resulting in a winning combination. The easier it is for creative workers to collide with ideas, the better.

Considering this, the ideal, open office would not be one place. It would be everywhere, open to the world. It would receive and consider every idea from anywhere—past, present, and future. In fact the world is building this "office" on the Internet. Without a doubt, the Internet should integrate with your creative space and it can serve as a model for the kind of physical openness you want to achieve in an office-based creative space. With or without it, the principal model for your creative space should be the open office, its principal characteristic, openness.

You may consider it unrealistic for your business to leap into the arms of wired office openness. However, you can begin to enjoy many of the pay-offs of a completely open office by at least tearing down some walls. Promoting creativity in the workplace always involves tearing down walls be they physical, mental, operational, procedural, or political.

***Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out
—Robert Frost, "Mending Wall"***

There are two sides to every wall, from a 10-foot-wide wall in the Tower of London to a pre-fabricated divider in your office. One side prevents outsiders from invading, the other protects insiders from invasion. Neither the preventive side nor the protective side fosters creativity.

In the workplace, the preventive side discourages collaboration, limits cross-pollination, prevents creative performers from getting all the information they crave—all of which inhibit creativity and retard innovation. The protective side protects turf, stifles spontaneity, insulates people from dealing with issues and conflicts, and generally helps maintain the status quo.

Intangible walls

A creative workspace needs to clearly define itself as a place where the walls put between people because of hierarchies are ignored, where spontaneity rules, and where there's no such thing as a bad idea. You must prevent the intangible walls of authority, politics, hidden agendas, tradition, and the like from rising within your creative space. A sort of benign rebellion needs to reign somewhere in order to encourage wide-open communication, enthusiastic collaboration, and broad-spectrum cross-pollination. To understand why, we should review just how creative ideas come to be.

How we think

Dr. Edward de Bono, author of [Serious Creativity](#) and recognized as a leading creativity guru, writes that, "The brain works to make life easy by making things routine. We form patterns of thinking and behavior and then we use these patterns." De Bono devotes much of his work to helping people understand that breaking these patterns is critical for creative thinking and how to develop creative thinking skills. He writes, "The creative

process is an interruption in the smooth flow of routine in order to pay deliberate attention at some point."

Productive organizations achieve success by applying knowledge (what we know), within a context (the business). Ironically, what we know also holds us back. The history of discovery bears this out. All important breakthroughs contradict some established knowledge. If creativity is "in with the new," it always demands "out with the old." Creative thinkers challenge what we know—they hammer away at the wall of knowledge. The story of progress contains a series of chapters on barriers destroyed. You can progress by providing a safe, risk-free place for destruction.

How do we create?

This question deserves almost all the books written about it. Nevertheless, distilled down to the essential elements, the formula for creativity might look like this:

$$T + E = P$$

where *T* is *trial*, *E* is *error*, and *P* is *progress*. Consider a toddler teaching himself to walk. He stands up, falls down, repeating the process until eventually he walks. Parents provide a safe and encouraging place for this process to happen. Motivation reaches a peak when the toddler realizes that mom and dad aren't as interested in toting him around. That in order to get what he wants, he's going to have to follow their example and put one foot in front of the other. Nature takes care of the rest.

Richard Feynman, the legendary bad boy of physics and Nobel laureate, inspired a formula similar to $T + E = P$. When asked to describe Feynman's method of solving problems, a colleague replied, "You write down the problem. You think very hard. Then you write the answer." It's good to know that the toddler, Feynman, and all creators fail. In fact, it's tempting to measure creative performance by the number of failures one has chalked up.

A creative space must provide, in addition to freedom from typical and traditional restraints, a sort of sanctuary where trial, error, and failure are not only tolerated, but expected in the interests of progress.

Where do we create?

Kurt VanEss studies space and how it affects work. In addition to his position as a corporate sales support specialist for Steelcase in Grand Rapids, Michigan, VanEss curates the Meyer May House, built by Frank Lloyd Wright. Entertaining his clients at the Meyer May House, talking about Frank Lloyd Wright over a gourmet lunch, VanEss demonstrates, as he extols, the power of environment.

He points to Steelcase research which finds that 80% of creative ideas happen in informal spaces. And he works for a company which is transforming its corporate headquarters to address this fact. Steelcase currently assigns 70% of the square footage in its corporate headquarters to informal space.

In several surveys of clients, we ask, "Where are you and what are you doing when you get your best ideas?" The number-one response—"driving in my car." Showering, jogging, and listening to music follow as other

inspiring situations. A survey by Chic Thompson crowned the bathroom "throne" as the principal seat of inspiration.

More importantly, no one claimed to get great ideas in the office or the office restroom. Every setting listed as the scene of creative inspiration involves fun or pleasure. Not one involves thinking or working on the problem! The ideal setting, then, is away from the workplace goofing off. How can this be?

Consistently creative people open their doors to all sorts of possibilities. The more possibilities they consider, the better their chances of letting in the wild idea that, combined with what they know and molded by their specific skills, makes an unmistakably breakthrough idea.

In short, the creative process thrives on diverse and exotic stimulation. Which is why creative people need and seek stimulation. The typical office discourages diverse stimulation. So creative people find it elsewhere.

George Kneller, in *The Art and Science of Creativity*, provides examples of creative spaces great creatives have devised. "Schiller, for example, filled his desk with rotten apples; Proust worked in a cork-lined room; Dr. Johnson surrounded himself with a purring cat, orange peel and tea; Hart Crane played jazz loud on a Victrola."

Kneller continues, "An extreme case is Kant, who would work in bed at certain times of the day with the blankets arranged around him in a way he had invented himself."

It would be foolish to argue that quirky creative spaces inhibit creativity. Nevertheless, you may not want even one of your employees to accumulate rotten apples. But if you absolutely must keep creative people in the office, at least give them a place where they can escape its everyday rigors. The more fun and comfortable the place, the better. The more suited to creative teamwork, the better.

What a creative space should provide

Pages upon pages have been published about creative-thinking techniques. Books full of creative games and exercises crowd bookstore shelves. Most of these tools and techniques can improve creative work wherever they are used. Likewise, the environment in which people work, using whatever tools and techniques they choose, can also improve how creatively they perform. Think of a working environment as a creativity tool. It won't make people more creative, but they can use it to improve their creative work.

We demonstrate this over and over again to groups we take to zoos, museums, restaurants, and rustic resorts. Getting away, crossing the bridge from the workplace to a play-place, puts people in a less stressful state of mind. Better work results, because fresh and unusual sights and sounds stimulate better work. People know they are allowed to have fun at a zoo and they do. With the restraints of performance removed, they perform better!

This comes as no surprise to anyone who has ever been inspired by a night in Paris, a flight through the Grand Canyon, a spontaneous walk in the woods, even an invigorating business conference. Some environments reinvigorate us by flooding our senses with new sensations. When new sensations collide with whatever happens to be on your mind, you are literally forced to make thousands of new connections, to see hundreds of

new possibilities.

Attention

Human attention and energy are limited resources. We need good health, adequate sleep, and a healthful diet to sustain productive energy. After that, attention is sustained by need and the promise of reward. People come equipped with the ability and need to create. The trick is to focus and sustain their attention on your company's needs. Then, to get them to work on them as enthusiastically as they would on their own needs. Part of the solution is to make your problems, their problems. This involves sharing the rewards of their solutions. A creative space can not solve this aspect of attention, but it can assist.

Stimulation

Stimulation arouses our attention. We are bombarded with stimuli which constantly compete for our attention. Individuals differ greatly with regard to how much and what kind of stimulation arouses their attention, but it's clear that too much or too little stimulation becomes non-productive in the workplace. If the workplace becomes familiar, and what workplace doesn't, stimulation from the workplace itself diminishes. Creative space can stimulate, especially if its users are allowed to manage the stimulation to suit their needs.

In his article, ["What's the Big Idea?"](#) Curtis Sittenfeld describes the Creative Solutions Thinkubator. "It's a combination rec room and art gallery, and it's filled with fun (and in some cases bizarre) gizmos and gadgets. There's custom furniture in the shape of a light bulb, a conch shell, a bright-red pair of lips. There's an 'aroma odorizer' that spills out 'creativity scents.' There's a sound system with a 500-CD jukebox, along with a collection of more than 5,000 CDs. There's a Wall of Wonder, which displays photos of the skylines of 30 cities. There's a team-brainstorming area that converts to a disco."

Focus

In order to focus their attention, that is, work in alignment with the organization's goals, individuals need to clearly understand: management's expectations of them, the organization's vision, its mission, and their role in achieving the organization's goals. In order to work creatively, they also need the authority and freedom to accomplish their mission with as little interference as possible.

Walt Disney built his empire of the imagination using an idea-generating process called *imagineering*—a combination of imagination and engineering, as the name suggests. The process is divergent, that is, it takes in ideas from anywhere. At the same time, however, the imagineers are focused. One imagineer explains, "Our process works because as individuals, we approach the idea differently, but together, we share a single vision."

That said, the question becomes, what kind of stimulation can a creative space provide to help focus creative energy and attention on your company's objectives?

What do you want your creative space to do?

Talking to Ron Lieber of [Fast Company](#), Dan Wieden, founder and CEO of [Wieden+Kennedy](#) explained that he

wanted new space to help people "live creative lives... I don't care whether you're a writer or in finance—or simply coming to visit us. If we're helping people lead surprising, audacious lives, that will infect everything else we do here." You will be off to a great start if you can define your objectives as clearly and succinctly.

How to make the space work

A creative space will support creative collaboration to the degree that it attracts teamwork to it. In biology we learned that plants and animals survived when, among other things, they found their ecological niche—that place which supplied their survival needs. When a life form left an ecological niche another would soon fill it. You can plan a creative space thinking of it as a kind of creative ecological niche. Let it supply the needs of your teams. Then, as in the [Field of Dreams](#), "If you build it, they will come."

More and more, the traditional connections between work and location have become blurred. Whether it's what they see on TV or how they worked in college, new workers expect to find themselves in loose-fitting clothes, in a loosely organized room, intently focused on a problem, throwing themselves into their work, collaborating free of corporate pecking orders.

In college, you worked in whatever place best suited to her work—dorm room, cafeteria, library, campus lawn. Teams organized themselves on the fly. And they worked.

Wieden hired a young, unknown designer to design his creative space, then invited a young, contemporary-art organization to take up residence there.

Flexibility

Since you can't predict what next year's breed of worker will expect or how their expectations will change, allow yourself maximum flexibility. Let the users of the space define the space. Your overarching strategy should be to attract and keep the new breed of knowledge workers emerging today. They have been trained to be information analyzers, idea generators. They will create the future for you if you support them with attractive space that supports the creative work they are prepared to perform.

Feeling

The most difficult concept for some of us to grasp is the concept of how a room feels. [Allen Cawley](#), director of the Innovation Station, a new creative space at Georgetown College (near Lexington, Kentucky), describes what he looks for in a creative space.

Someone walking in should feel comfortably disoriented.

It should wake up your brain.

It should scream collaboration.

Comfortably disoriented

Disorientation is essential to creativity. It's been described other ways, but in order to move from the old to the new, we have to change our orientation. We have to agree to change something, to look at things in new ways, and take the risks which that implies.

In order to comfortably disorient, a room can present itself as playful. It can exhibit design elements and furnishings that challenge our expectations. For example, the entire building which houses the University of Cincinnati College of Design, Art, Architecture, and Planning (DAAP) is meant to disturb one's expectations. Walls are not vertical, halls are not straight, and rooms are not laid out in familiar shapes.

Wake up Your Brain

While the room should be ergonomically comfortable, it should not make you want to lie down and go to sleep. The challenge to stay awake and create should be clear. A place that says, "risks will be taken here," can be disconcerting, whether or not you're used to taking risks. But then risk is not risk unless it's somewhat unsettling.

Scream collaboration

Bob Dylan is supposed to have said, "Money doesn't talk, it screams." That's the kind of screaming we're talking about. Clear and direct. There should be no doubt whatsoever that this is a place to create, collaborate, and have fun. Someone about to use the room should see the tools they need, not just adequate tools, the best you can afford. Computer and telecommunication tools help convey this message as well as support collaboration.

Planning

Before designing, consult with your future users. A formal questionnaire can draw out answers to some basic needs and wants, uncover problems, and get the team's creative thinking on the next step—offering their ideas.

Jordan Ayan, in his book, [Aha!](#) provides some of the questions you might want to ask to see how your people feel about their work environment:

1. When you are trying to be creative, do you ever wish you had a better place to work?
2. Are you willing (or allowed) to redecorate your office or work space?
3. Would you consider moving to a location that makes you feel more creative?

Seed your idea session with the responses to your research as well as with examples of what other companies have done.

In your planning meetings consider the activities, culture, and behavior of group members. Document and

outline all of these elements. Take the needs and wants and ideas of your team, give them to an internal group or outside consultant as soon as you've lined up the financial commitment.

When you build or remodel a room, don't ignore off-site opportunities. Parks, the zoo, amusement parks, museums, fitness centers, the roof, and other outdoor areas might offer temporary or additional creative space in addition to what you build. Can you make arrangements to use a nearby park, museum, or building with outstanding stimulation features? Don't sacrifice your creative space for an off-site space, but enhance your own by making it a base for regular off-site field trips.

John Kao advises that "Place is essential to creativity, and the construction, or deconstruction, of place can be every bit as creative as anything that occurs within its confines." If your success strategy includes creative performance, then creativity and the essential place will be a significant contributor to your company's success. Therefore, if you can find money for technology, people, business process, you can find money for space. Kurt VanEss of Steelcase says that "space can be the cheapest part of preparing for the future of the way people work—more collaboratively."

Design

At the top of this article I suggested that if you want to make space for creative work, the collective wisdom within your organization already knows pretty well what you need. The question then, is how to transform that collective wisdom into space?

First, just to dispel any suspicion that transforming wisdom into space represents a harebrained notion, consider what author and creative consultant Rowan Gibson, in an interview with [Vern Burkhardt](#) on [IdeaConnection](#), says he wants to do:

You know, most big companies have some form of training center or research center, which they may have recently renamed their "Innovation Center." But if I look inside those places, all I usually find is the same old, tired spaces for brainstorming or team meetings. Sure, they can put a few colorful beanbag chairs or hammocks in there to make the place look more creative. But what I miss is any kind of innovation methodology that is reflected in the space.

So what I'm trying to do now is turn the processes and tools outlined in [Innovation to the Core](#) into an operating system and a design principle for the next generation of innovation centers. So it's quite literally becoming a "blueprint"—this time an architectural one—for transforming the way companies innovate.

Gibson's dream of the next generation of innovation centers, presents an example of practicing what you preach or realizing what you say you stand for. Companies that put their ideas into practice throughout their products, policies, workspaces, and practices give us plenty of examples of how doing so brings unique rewards.

Google.com and other leading Internet portals allow users to customize the user experience. For example, if you use Google as your home base or portal to the rest of the Internet, you can customize the first page you see when you enter the Internet, to present you with the features you prefer rather than accept the default Google

page would normally provide. Google offers this user-design capability, so that you will feel more at home. In which case, you'll use Google more often or even exclusively.

More recently, Google has entered the browser wars with [Chrome](#), its own browser, an online creative space with a compelling design story behind it. You will see and hear in this video, one of the brilliant young people who created Chrome explain how the new browser gives each webpage "its own little playground, its own little sandbox." In addition, Chrome code is open source, so that anyone with the ability can help make it better.

As if they've learned this lesson from the playground, [Play](#) creative agency has created different spaces to support the different ways their people create. They bordered their Greenroom with glass walls. In the Garage people can make a mess and close the steel door. And for those who need a quiet place to ponder and reflect, there's the Shhh Room with couch, bookshelf, and think cards.

Location

Talking to people who have built creative spaces, the only place I've ever heard mentioned as taboo, was the basement. Rick Tabb of Workshops said, "You're going to kill it right there. No matter how many bright colors you put on the wall, a creative room needs the right amount of natural light in order to work."

With that in mind, your creative space should also be easily available to everyone who will use it. When in use it should be situated so that it won't interfere with other work in the building. Creativity can be noisy.

Construction

The users of the creative space should be its designers, and they will probably come to most of these obvious recommendations themselves. But here are a few guidelines worth considering.

High ceiling to communicate openness

Plenty of room (square feet per user) for freedom of movement

Stimulating colors and textures to encourage play and participation

Sound proofing, echo baffling to protect the rest of your office from distraction

Furnishings

Add furnishings for comfort.

Don't go for products. Plan, then find products to suit plan.

Stay flexible, use reconfigurable elements.

The fewer nailed-down items, the better, the more opportunity for new solutions.

Provide lots of work surface and make it obviously visible.

Encourage kindergarten-like sprawling and stretching out.

Include a food source, refrigerator with fruit and beverages, coffee making equipment.

Lighting

Rick Tabb recommends natural light, but accepts other sources in the following order if natural light is not available.

1. natural light
2. full-spectrum incandescent
3. full-spectrum fluorescent
4. regular incandescent
5. regular incandescent

Color

According to Doug Hall, "loud colors cultivate loud ideas." However, few writers are as specific about color as Jordan Ayan. He claims that warm colors—red, oranges, yellow, brown—excite people and increase energy. The cool colors—blue, green, grey—create a calming effect. If you intend to use color to produce a specific effect be sure not to paint yourself into a corner. Be sure to vary color for stimulation. Room for posters and other colorful hanging works can help keep color stimulation fresh.

Music

Music has the power to affect people's mood and mood affects performance. While these effects have been studied and the findings exploited for everything from driving young men to the deaths in battle to calming claustrophobics in elevators, your best bet is a reliable CD player and a budget for stocking your space with the CDs your team selects.

Thinkubator's creator, Gerald Haman used to produce music, so it's no surprise that music plays a big role at his creative space. Visitors get to choose the music and choose from a music menu during breaks. They also pay requests.

Doug Hall favors television theme songs, because they help us recall shared experiences, but almost any kind of

music can do that, depending on your audience. For opening a session and during breaks, we've found Motown music to be among the most universally acceptable, but that could change tomorrow. For concentration, groups seem to appreciate classical and jazz without lyrics. Environmental sounds also create a stimulating ambiance.

Temperature

Rick Tabb recommends keeping a room just a little on the cool side in order to keep an edge on people's energy. Coolness encourages movement and activity. But in the end, you want to give the people in the room the ability to regulate the temperature and the flow of fresh air. Nothing happens without oxygen.

Technology

The most productive creative space has to compete with today's telecommunication capabilities. Companies are collaborating online and downloading information instantly from all over the world. Don't expect a group working with library books and phone messages to compete effectively in this arena. If you can't build it in now, make sure your room is ready to receive online information access, retrieval, and storage capabilities tomorrow. This could be the room where you also stage your video conferences.

If necessity is the mother of invention, then information is the fodder. Don't scrimp on access to information.

Toys

The most outspoken advocate of toys is Doug Hall. "All of us have children inside us. It's just that sometimes, it's hard to get the child to come out and play. That's why toys are important." Taking toys very seriously at the Eureka! Ranch, Hall and his Trained Brains provide pinball machines, yo-yos, Nerf guns, Silly String, volleyball and basketball courts, an outdoor pool, and more.

Hall has taught marketers of the world's most competitive products—Disney, Nike, Pepsi—that play and playing with toys works. Play allows people to establish immediate, common bonds. Toys make play much more tangible and work much less like work. Let your people fill a space with toys and let the games begin.

Attire

Casual, loose-fitting clothes are mandatory at the Eureka! Ranch. Hall writes that creativity works best when you wear what you'd wear to wash your car. "I take a strong stand on clothes. If you want to make things happen, you have to be comfortable."

In *Jump Start Your Brain*, Doug Hall recommends a "Watch Box"—literally, a box into which all participants must drop their timepieces before the session. We take it further. Players in our workshops must enter stripped of neckties, epaulets, or any other corporate status symbol.

Food

The first thing out of Rick Tabb's mouth on this subject was, "No prime rib." Make sure creative players have access to good, fresh food. The room should have what Tabb calls a self-fueling station. He recommends fruits, granola, sugar, caffeine, and the book [The Way Life Works](#) by Mahlon Hoagland and Bert Dodson. In it you'll find easy-to-follow directions on how to fuel the human body for maximum performance.

Jordan Ayan tells us that carbohydrates tend to cause drowsiness while protein tends to increase alertness. Scientific research apparently points to a low-fat, high-protein diet as a contributor to creative performance. Science also supports the experience that coffee delivers clear, quick thinking.

Again from "What's the Big Idea?" "'When you're in a meeting and you're hungry, your mind focuses on eating rather than on thinking,' Haman says. So visitors to the Thinkubator enjoy an endless supply of snacks — including fruit, candy, herbal energy boosters, and, yes, cookies in the shape of a light bulb."

Finally, Doug Hall says, "When the belly is glutted with heavy grub, it seems your body spends so much energy processing food that the brain is shortchanged."

Following through

Smokey the Bear used to remind us that a mere spark could ignite a raging forest fire. "Only you can prevent forest fires," he'd say, pointing an admonishing paw. It's important to keep in mind that a manager's job is to get around Smokey. To make sure the sparks don't get stamped out. Even the hottest creative ideas will die unless they are fanned. The single most important challenge for a creative manager is to make sure creative fires are fanned not extinguished.

Some basic rules, then, for making sure fire drenchers don't ruin your creative space.

1. Everybody, strip your stripes.
2. Expose hidden agendas or leave them outside.
3. Shift into collaborative gear.
4. Play. Act think like a kid and you'll start thinking like one.

Like all creative tools and techniques, a stimulating workspace can help improve creative work. But it is no substitute for a team of highly motivated creative people taking an active part in making their own creative culture.

We have a most instructive principle for inspiring creative culture in the [Declaration of Independence](#). It declares that "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed..." Substitute any authority, including corporate authority, for "Government" and you have the basis for ensuring motivated teams in your creative space.



Songwriter, author, ghostwriter, copywriter and content provider Peter Lloyd writes *Right Brain Workouts* for goCreate.com and IdeaConnection.com and blogs for businesses including CoachQuest.

With co-author Stephen R. Grossman he created [Animal Crackers](#), the creative-problem-solving process for tough business problems. Lloyd was also the ghostwriter of Marco Marsan's [The Lion's Way](#) and [Think Naked: Childlike brilliance in the rough adult world](#).

In most of his real jobs he has worked as an advertising writer or creative director with big and small ad agencies, including a run as Innovation Activist at Northlich. During more than 20 years in the advertising agency business, Lloyd has developed campaigns for national advertisers and won coveted creative advertising awards.